CONSUMING HABITS

Global and historical perspectives on how cultures define drugs
Second edition

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typically paid more attention to the study of drug-production abroad than to consumption at home.


7 Douglas and Isherwood, op. cit., p. 57 (my emphasis).

8 An exception to this generalization would be the Islamic world in which a distinction of this kind has a long history.


10 Allen, op. cit.


14 On this see S. Hugh-Jones, op. cit.

15 See, for example, Weir, op. cit., pp. 130–4 on *khat* and E. Bott, ‘Psychoanalysis and ceremony’, in J. La Fontaine (ed.), *The Interpretation of Ritual*, London, Tavistock, 1972, pp. 207–15 on *kava*.

16 I use inverted commas here to indicate covert categories not verbally labelled in local languages and of local application.

17 When men gather large quantities of insects, frogs or fruit, these may take the place of fish or meat but such foods are not to be considered as making up a paradigmatic ‘proper meal’.

18 The leaves are those of *Banisteriopsis ruscifolia*.

19 On the crucial integrative, binding function of gravy in British cuisine see A. Murcott, ‘On the sociological significance of the “cooked dinner” in South Wales’, *Social Science Information*, 1982, vol. 21, pp. 677–96. Advertisements for ‘browning’ and other products used in gravy-making frequently play upon the metaphorical role of gravy in binding the family together and more psychologically inclined advertisers see links between gravy and sexual fluids (Sue Byrne – personal communication).

20 This vomiting out of beer is not simply a matter of practical expedient; it has been widely reported in different parts of Amazonia, typically as a ritualized activity associated with ideas concerning fertility. For an excellent example of this, see E. Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy’s Point of View*, Chicago, IL, Chicago University Press, 1992. That beer also loosens the bowels and that yage causes both vomiting and diarrhoea both form parts of a whole Barasana philosophy of life-processes based on images of the digestive tube and its functions. (See S. Hugh-Jones, op. cit.). Similar ideas relating fertility to the force-feeding of food and coca are found in Andean communities (see Allen, op. cit., Ch. 6).

21 Tobacco forms one of a set of ritually marked male-owned crops, mostly ‘non-foods’ but also including maize and fruit trees, the usable parts of which are all borne above the ground. Apart from chilli peppers, all women’s crops come from below the ground. This is a further aspect of the ritually marked status of chillies.

3 NICOTIAN DREAMS

The prehistory and early history of tobacco in eastern North America

Alexander von Gernet

ORIGINS OF TOBACCO SMOKING

The botanical origin of the genus *Nicotiana* has been traced to South America. Ancient tobacco remains, smoking pipes and snuffing implements dating to various time periods have been recovered, although the reconstruction of the human use of tobacco on that continent is preliminary. Researchers have, however, been able to elucidate the South American tobacco complex as it existed in the interval between first European contact in the early sixteenth century and modern times. This complex included the ritualized consumption of nicotine substances, not only by smoking, but also by sniffing, drinking and even rectal injection.

The use of *Nicotiana* during the Historic period was associated with slash-and-burn farming. Indeed, Wilbert has hypothesized that South American natives did not use the plant prior to the origins of horticulture, and that earlier forager societies were ‘drug-free’. But it seems far more likely that ‘tobacco shamanism’, as Wilbert calls it, was a vestigial trait of a hunter-gatherer lifestyle that was merely elaborated after the domestication of plants. Wild species of tobacco were probably known to the earliest pre-horticultural societies in the Americas, and it is reasonable to assume that the artificial selection of such species by foragers may even have contributed to the development of horticulture.

Little is known of the origins of tobacco use in Central America, the West Indies and Mexico. Archaeological evidence suggests that an elaborate tobacco complex was present in both the Prehistoric and Historic periods. While the relationship of this complex to the South American equivalent has not been studied, similarities in the smoking technology of prehistoric Mexico and the rest of North America have been demonstrated.
The mechanism and timing of the spread of *Nicotiana* species into North America remains poorly understood.\(^{11}\) While tubular smoking devices have been found on 3,000-year-old archaeological sites,\(^{12}\) the recovery of pipes does not necessarily illuminate the origins of tobacco use, since dozens of non-nicotian plants were smoked by North American Indians.\(^{13}\) Furthermore, the failure to recover pipes in earlier contexts does not suggest the absence of tobacco, since smoking devices were also manufactured from perishable materials and tobacco was consumed in other ways than by smoking. Chemical analyses of prehistoric pipe dottle and other residues have occasionally been successful in identifying alkaloids such as nicotine,\(^{14}\) but the results have not always been conclusive.\(^{15}\)

Despite these uncertainties, it is generally acknowledged that domesticated species of *Nicotiana* reached the northern continent through human agency and were introduced into eastern North America more than 2,000 years ago. Microscopic examinations of charred seed remains recovered by floating soil samples in water has resulted in the identification of over 4,000 tobacco seeds from a hundred archaeological sites in eastern North America. So far, the earliest specimens have been dated to the first century BC.\(^{16}\)

The tobacco plant was probably incorporated into North American cultures because it could be readily adapted to an existing ideational context or set of beliefs. Cross-cultural analysis has enabled anthropologists to identify the underlying ideational stratum that gives native peoples in the New World a cultural unity. The ethnographic record suggests that the core elements of this belief system were linked to ecstatic shamanism and included an emphasis on altered states of consciousness. Dissociative states or out-of-body experiences were believed to facilitate communication with spirit beings and to permit transformation into such beings. The empirical support for this belief was found primarily in visual hallucinations as well as nocturnal dreams.\(^{17}\)

Altered states of consciousness were induced by a variety of means, including prolonged isolation, rhythmic dancing, fasting and the adjustment of body chemistry through the ingestion of psychoactive substances. There is both cultural and botanical evidence that the latter practice is of considerable antiquity in the Americas. Indeed, anthropologists and ethnobotanists now argue that the earliest human foragers who migrated from Siberia to America at least 15,000 years ago carried with them a cultural predisposition for the use of psychoactive plants. As humans moved into new ecosystems they sought not only subsistence-related foods such as berries and nuts, but also flora which would help sustain and develop the basic tenets of a shamanistic ideology.\(^{18}\)

Recent research has shown that *N. rustica*, the tobacco species propagated throughout prehistoric eastern North America, produces altered states of consciousness and even hallucinations if ingested in significant doses.\(^{19}\) It appears that many native peoples favoured this species of tobacco because of the alkaloids it contained; hence, the original domestication process may have involved a gradual artificial selection of those plant populations which, when consumed, manifested the greatest potency or spiritual power.

While many psychoactive plants, including tobacco, were ingested through the gastrointestinal system, burning such substances and consuming the remains via the respiratory route has both physiological advantages and symbolic import. Not only do the lungs provide some alkaloids, particularly nicotine, extremely rapid access to the bloodstream, but the blowing and sucking of smoke are perceived to be shamanistic metaphors for the transfer of spiritual power. Hence it may not be coincidental that the earliest smoking-pipes resemble the sucking tubes used by shamans in healing rituals.\(^{20}\) Over the course of millennia, the smoking complex appears to have evolved into a kind of democratized shamanism in which the use of pipes was, in many cases, no longer restricted to medico-religious specialists.\(^{21}\) As a result, pipes are among the most salient features of the North American archaeological record.\(^{22}\)

Despite the pivotal role of pipes in North American life and the 'sacred' nature of some of these smoking devices, these objects were not the basis of a specific Amerindian belief system. Contrary to assertions made in one recent work on the subject,\(^{23}\) native peoples of North America did not practice a 'pipe-centered religion'. Rather, it is more helpful to consider permutations of the pipe complex as attenuated symbolic transformations of basic shamanistic principles.\(^{24}\) While pipe symbolism has remarkable consistency throughout the continent, some similarities such as the presence of bird effigies and other ornithomorphic accoutrements, may be linked less to diffusion, and more to the constraining influence of shamanism and its animistic *Weltanschauung*.\(^{25}\)

**AMERICAN TOBACCO USE AT THE TIME OF EUROPEAN CONTACT**

As European exploration of the eastern seaboard of North America intensified during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, numerous observations on the indigenous inhabitants of the region were recorded. These ethnohistoric accounts document the use of tobacco and pipes in virtually every eastern North American culture from Québec to Florida. The following summary is gleaned from a detailed analysis of primary sources relating to the period 1500–1650.\(^{26}\)

Since propagation of *N. rustica* required very little human intervention, it is unlikely that intensive horticultural preparation was necessary for a successful harvest.\(^{27}\) Indeed, even foragers like the Micmac, who did not grow crops for subsistence, grew tobacco.\(^{28}\) Some observers noted the presence of tobacco in clearings together with field crops, while others
indicated that the plant was grown independently in small plots or among wild herbs and fruits.\textsuperscript{29} Although agriculture was predominantly a female-related activity, there is evidence that tobacco was planted and collected by men.\textsuperscript{30}

In much of eastern North America, tobacco was not only smoked but cast (as a dried powder or compressed leaf mass) into fires, water, and rock crevices. The reason for this was linked to the widespread belief that even inanimate objects had souls, and that spirits inhabited virtually every realm. Humans and spirit beings were thought to live in a social world where there was a perpetual obligation to fulfill an ancient contract. Spirit beings were particularly fond of tobacco and, hence, were offered the precious substance at every opportunity. The gifts were sent either directly to their terrestrial and underwater dwellings, or indirectly to the sky-world in the form of smoke. In return for these gratuities, which were invariably accompanied by invocatory prayers, the spirit beings were expected to provide certain favors. In some communities tobacco was offered daily to the rising and setting sun. It was also sprinkled on fires during occasional rites such as funerals, or at cyclical events such as corn harvesting. The rite was especially prominent in the sweatlodge, where it helped to divine the cause of illness, pacify various disease agents, or encourage a pestilence to leave a village. It was customary to carry extra tobacco during travel since humans were particularly dependent on the goodwill of spirits when away from home. Invocations were habitually performed at any change in the weather, or to pay homage to those responsible for violent storms on lakes. Moreover, it was deemed necessary to conciliate spirits when negotiating a canoe through difficult rapids and at portages where travellers felt exposed to ambush. Journeys were interrupted at any unusual or awe-inspiring natural features such as canyons and waterfalls, since these were believed to be the abodes of powerful beings who demanded tobacco. To ensure success in hunting, fishing and war expeditions, invocations were also performed before or during such ventures.\textsuperscript{31} The universality of these rites is likely a consequence of the remarkable cultural continuity that characterizes the region.\textsuperscript{32}

The infatuation with tobacco that was attributed to the spirits was arguably a reflection and extension of the high regard that humans had for the plant. Time and time again observers expressed astonishment at the tobacco addiction of many of the peoples they met in America. Both Iroquoian- and Algonquian-speaking peoples were seen with pipes in their mouths at all hours of the day and night, and tobacco figured prominently in the dreams they recalled. Not only was the leaf greatly prized, but many individuals seemed more ready to dispense with eating than with smoking. These impressions were corroborated by conversations with natives who sometimes admitted that there was nothing in the world they loved more than tobacco. Pipes were included as essential grave goods, for even the souls who travelled to the land of the dead were believed to be dedicated smokers.\textsuperscript{33} As the Jesuit missionary Paul le Jeune recorded in 1634, the Montagnais, in what is now the Canadian province of Québec, had a fondness... for this herb [that] is beyond belief. They go to sleep with their reed pipes in their mouths, they sometimes get up in the night to smoke; they often stop in their journeys for the same purpose, and it is the first thing they do when they reenter their cabins. I have lighted tinder, so as to allow them to smoke while paddling a canoe, I have often seen them gnaw the stems of their pipes when they had no more tobacco, I have seen them scrape and pulverize a wooden pipe to smoke it. Let us say with compassion that they pass their lives in smoke, and at death fall into the fire.\textsuperscript{34}

Five years later Jérôme Lallemant found that the Huron of Ontario were anxious to know whether tobacco was available in heaven, claiming that they could not dispense with it in the Christian afterlife. Indeed, the Jesuits soon regarded abstention from smoking not only as a positive sign of conversion but as the most heroic act to be expected of any neophyte.\textsuperscript{35}

With the exception of one apocryphal source on the Delaware, there is no evidence that women smoked in the pre-1650 period, and ample testimony that virtually every male had a pipe. Although Micmac children were eager to inhale the second-hand smoke emitted from their fathers’ noses, the Pokanoket considered it odious for young boys to smoke.\textsuperscript{36}

Prehistoric smoking devices recovered archaeologically in eastern North America are made from stone, or more often from clay.\textsuperscript{37} Early French and English writers noted that Amerindian pipes were also manufactured from reed, wood, bone antler and even lobster claws. By the early seventeenth century, copper and tin acquired from European traders supplemented these materials. Roger Williams observed that the Narragansett even learned the European craft of casting pewter and brass pipes. By the 1620s, these southern New England Algonquians also adopted steel drills. The Micmac and Delaware, by contrast, continued, after 1630, to employ drills made of traditional material the laborious task of piercing the stems and bowls of stone pipes.\textsuperscript{38}

Early descriptions and illustrations suggest that the majority of smoking devices were either short, one-piece elbow pipes, or longer, two-piece versions having a stone or clay bowl with a detachable reed or wooden stem. Since the perishable stem is almost never recovered archaeologically, it has been difficult to assess the overall length of most two-piece specimens. The ethnohistoric sources indicate that these ranged from 30 cm to over 180 cm and were, occasionally, employed as leaning sticks. As John Smith noted in 1608, even the 75-cm pipe wielded by the Susquehannock were
'sufficient to beat out the brains of a man'. Some authorities suggest that the separate-stemmed pipes may have served a different ritual purpose than one-piece devices, but there is little documentary support for this assertion.

Both archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence suggests that pipes were highly valued. The Huron went to great lengths to prolong the use-life of ceramic smoking devices by carefully grinding and polishing chipped bowls and stems, and by using human blood as a bonding agent to repair fractures. Among the Montagnais the breakage of pipes was common enough to have become a theme in their mythology. During his exploration of the St Lawrence River in 1603, Samuel de Champlain recorded a tale related to him by a chief named Anadabijou:

He told me . . . that once upon a time there was a man who had a good supply of tobacco (which is a herb, of which they take the smoke), and that God came to this man, and asked him where was his tobacco-pipe. The man took his tobacco-pipe and gave it to God, who smoked tobacco a great while; after He had smoked enough God broke the said pipe into many pieces; and the man asked Him, 'Why hast Thou broken my pipe? Surely Thou seest that I have no other?' And God took one of His own, and gave it to him, saying to him: 'Here is one that I give thee, carry it to thy grand Sagamore; charge him to keep it, and if he keep it well, he shall never want for anything whatever, nor any of his companions.' The man took the pipe, and gave it to his grand Sagamore, and as long as he kept the savages wanted for nothing in the world; but afterwards the said Sagamore lost this pipe, and this is the reason of the great famine which sometimes comes among them. I asked him whether he believed all this; and he said yes, and that it was true.

Smoking technology was not confined to pipes alone, but included a number of other accessories. At home, pipes were lit at a hearth using a live coal or a firebrand, while on journeys fire was produced by rubbing sticks or striking stones. By the early seventeenth century, these rudimentary methods of lighting pipes were supplemented with burning mirrors, steel and tinder boxes acquired from French and English traders. The most oft-mentioned accessory was the tobacco pouch, which was observed hanging from the waist or neck of virtually every man. It was usually made of leather, although the specially prepared, severed hands of enemies were also used for this purpose. The Attikamek, Huron and other groups decorated their pouches, often using dyed porcupine quills. In addition to tobacco and pipes, pouches contained charms, mirrors and poisonous plants used in suicides. Tobacco pouches were valuable commodities which were occasionally requested by shamans in return for curing services or offered as stakes during gambling.

Amid the frequent allusions to individual smoking, one also finds references to formal pipe ceremonialism at councils and other assemblies. As Pierre Biard wrote of the Micmac in 1611, 'all their talks, treaties, welcomes, and entreaties are made under the fumes of this tobacco'. Among many groups it was a common practice to smoke in silence for at least one half-hour before deliberations, speeches, or welcoming visitors. Participants either brought their own smoking devices or puffed on a communal pipe. References to the 'peace-pipe' or calumet ceremonialism are rare in the pre-1650 literature, although some 'passing-the-pipe' rituals almost certainly associated friendship with the sharing of tobacco before then. Even the term 'smoking', when used as a figure of speech in Iroquois political rhetoric, symbolized peaceful, friendly discourse. Pipes did not always have peaceful connotations, however, for they were occasionally employed in the torture of prisoners. In the 1640s the Mohawk scarred their captives with red-hot pipes, burned their finger-tips in pipe bowls, and forced them to handle the live coals used to light their smoking implements.

Smoking was a prominent feature of community festivals and dances. In fact, the Huron, Algonquin and Montagnais frequently had feasts at which nothing was consumed except tobacco. Pipes were also brought to sweatlodges and missionary sermons as well as taken on raiding expeditions. Storytelling sessions were often accompanied by pipe smoking, where even the mythologies alluded to tobacco. In short, there are few contexts in which references to smoking, pipes and tobacco pouches are not found.

Amerindians did not, therefore, confine smoking to formal social, political, ceremonial and ritual occasions. In eastern North America tobacco use had, by the time of European contact, already become popularized but to describe it as secular would be to misconstrue the fundamentals of native belief systems and the role of tobacco in them. In native ideology virtually everything was permeated with a sacro-sanctity. From a shamanistic viewpoint, pipe smoking was a means of facilitating communication with spirit beings and a vehicle for individual empowerment. The ubiquity of smoking as documented in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries should not be regarded merely as a profanation generated by the addictive properties of nicotine. Indeed, each inhalation and exhalation, while not always intended to produce altered states of consciousness or other manifestations of the sacred, afforded the lay person at least some access to the spiritual aspects of the cosmos, thereby curtailing the religious hegemony of the shaman in what were essentially egalitarian societies.

The use of tobacco was also linked to the practical exigencies of everyday living. There are reports that individuals smoked to suppress hunger and quench thirst. The leaf was apparently regarded as a nutrient since it was not only smoked but occasionally eaten, either alone or as an
ingredient in corn-bread. Yet this form of consumption too may have been perceived as the ingestion of a metaphysical rather than physical substance. Like many other plants, tobacco was believed to be an animate leaf having a soul.

EUROPEAN APPROPRIATION OF TOBACCO

Given the extraordinary preoccupation with tobacco, it is not surprising that early European explorers expressed an interest in the herb. Exploration and colonization efforts in South America, Central America, the West Indies and Mexico brought Spain and Portugal in contact with tobacco-using natives during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. By 1535, the French had encountered pipe smoking Iroquoians along the St Lawrence River. Twenty years later, a French writer described the cigar-smoking Tupinamba of Brazil. It is almost certain that N. rustica had been imported and was growing in herbal gardens in the Low Countries by the 1550s, although there is no indication that tobacco was widely used anywhere in Europe before 1560.

English explorers recorded the use of tobacco during a trip to Florida in 1545, and the plant was apparently smoked by at least some Englishmen in the early 1570s — long before Raleigh is alleged to have introduced the custom. Nevertheless, the pipe was still a novelty during the penultimate decade of the century.

The interval between the time the first description of Amerindian pipe smoking appeared and the period of widespread appropriation of the habit by Europeans was remarkably short, especially in England. When Thomas Hariot, the English scientist who accompanied Ralph Lane’s expedition to North America, encountered the North Carolina Algonquians smoking tobacco in 1585-6, he described the behaviour in terms which suggest that he was introducing his readers to something new:

There is an herbe which is sowed a part by it selfe & is called by the inhabitants uppaoce: In the West Indies it hath divers names, according to the several places & countries where it groweth and is used: The Spaniards generally call it Tobacco. The leaves thereof being dried and brought into powder: they use to take the fume or smoke thereof, by sucking it through pipe made of clay, into their stomacke and head: from whence it purgeth superfluous flame & other grosse humors openeth all the pores & passages of the body: by which means the use thereof, not only preserveth the body from obstructions; but also if any be, so that they have not bee of too long continuance, in short time breakest them: whereby their bodies are notably preserved in health, & know not

many greevous diseases wherewithall wee in England are oftentimes afflicted.

Shortly before 1590 the English began manufacturing pipes of white ball-clay as cheap and convenient alternatives to makeshift smoking devices. These early pipes resembled Amerindian versions recovered on archaeological sites along the eastern seaboard of North America, which suggests that the manufacturers used models brought back by Hariot or other survivors of the Roanoke expeditions. By 1598, descriptions of smoking appeared in the European travel literature much as the Amerindian tobacco complex had been featured in earlier reports from the New World. Scarcely twelve years after Hariot had marvelled at the curious custom in America, a Silesian named Paul Hentzner described, with equal wonder and in similar terms, the identical habit during a visit to England:

the English constantly use the Nicotian plant, which in the American language they call Tabaca (others call it Petun) and generally in this way. They have pipes made of clay for this purpose; in the lower end of these they put the plant, so dried that it can be easily reduced to powder, and light it. They draw smoke into their mouths from the upper end; this comes out again through the nose as if through funnels. It brings with it much phlegm and discharge from the head.

Since smoking appears to have had no precedent in European history, it may seem amazing that it should have gained rapid and sweeping popularity in a society believing itself superior to 'savages' in matters of behaviour. As was the case with the selection of strong (and hence symbolically charged) Nicotiana species by prehistoric Amerindians, tobacco was appropriated by sixteenth-century Europeans because it could be easily adapted to existing contexts. The lower classes were undoubtedly introduced to smoking in European seaports by sailors returning from the New World. The potency of the imported varieties of Amerindian tobacco may have played a role during the early years of diffusion, since, as Pena and De l'Obel recalled in their celebrated herbal in 1571, sailors affirmed that 'their brains are full'd by a joyous intoxication after smoking the leaf.' This observation confirmed one made a few years earlier by the Swiss scientist Konrad von Gesner who had experimented with the new plant. He named it Vertiginose ('producing dizziness'), and noted that its power and speed in causing dizziness and a species of intoxication is indeed wonderful. It is no wonder, perhaps, that the social context of the consumption of tobacco was the tavern. Unfortunately, little is known of the varieties and alkaloid content of the various Nicotiana species used in late sixteenth-century Europe, except that N. rustica was certainly among
ALEXANDER VON GERNET

them; hence it is difficult to ascertain the degree which the desire for recreational altered states of consciousness contributed to the early popularity of the habit.

Much more is known of the ideological context which set the stage for rapid diffusion beyond the seaports. This cultural predisposition had not, of course, anything to do with shamanism, but was, at least to some extent, linked to the humoral theory that prevailed as the central medical paradigm of the era. According to this theory the healthy human body had a proper balance of ‘humours’, which had properties conceptualized in terms of dialectical oppositions such as hot/cold and dry/moist. Smoking fitted into this schema, since it seemed to dry out superfluous ‘humours’, thereby adjusting imbalances caused by inappropriate diet and climate.57 In effect, tobacco entered the European theatre as a panacea which had long been sought by medieval alchemy. Here at last — as the title of an early treatise on tobacco suggests — was Joyfull Newses Out of the Newe Founde Worldes.60

The notion of a panacea was reinforced by a persistent rumour of uncertain origin that the Indians themselves favoured the herb because of its medicinal efficacy. This theme is frequently reiterated in the pre-1650 literature on North America. Tobacco was believed to heal wounds; assuage pain such as toothache; overcome extremes of weather; warm the body, brain and stomach; purge ‘humidities’ and superfluous moisture; counter rheumatic and respiratory problems; eliminate crudities, obstructions and indigestible matter; open pores, passages and bowels; induce sleep; calm passions; energize and restore strength; preserve general health and lengthen life. It was reasoned that, since harsh climates, diets and lifestyles made the inhabitants of the New World more prone to imbalances, native peoples needed to smoke frequently.60 Even more imaginative was the view that tobacco acted as an anti-aphrodisiac, or, to borrow Marc Lescarbot’s decorous language, ‘hindered the functions of Venus’. This idea was invoked to help explain certain tendencies towards sexual modesty among both the Micmac and the Huron. It was hypothesized that smoke, directly entering the brain, depressed the senses and thereby inhibited promiscuity.60 When combined with the salubrious effects of plant, this additional characteristic made tobacco attractive especially to the clergy. Paradoxically, the regular ingestion that was intended to preserve a healthy and moral lifestyle soon led to widespread addiction and abuse. Indeed, several seventeenth-century popes were obliged to issue Bulls curtailing excessive tobacco use among ecclesiastical officials, and whether or not smoking broke the pre-communion fast was much debated in theological circles.71

By the first decade of the seventeenth century, two diametrically opposed positions about smoking had emerged. Some Europeans held that the devil had given tobacco to Amerindians to produce deceptive hallucinations in the shamans and their followers.72 It was this link with the inherently diabolic characteristics of New World ‘barbarism’ that prompted King James I to issue his infamous Counterblaste to Tobacco in 1604, in which he encouraged his countrymen to consider ‘what honour or policie can move us to imitate the barbarous and beastly maners of the wilde, goddesse, and slavish Indians, especially in so vile and stinking a custome’.73 This, and other vitriolic diatribes, fell on deaf ears since others, including influential physicians and herbalists, felt that tobacco was a gift from God sent to alleviate the suffering of humans. While it would have been preferable that the herb was discovered as a stray weed in the Vatican gardens, finding it in America did not preclude adapting it to a Christian life. As William Barclay noted in 1614, ‘God honoured America and blessed it by this wonderful and sacred plant’. It was not long before tobacco was being hailed as ‘the salvation of the world’ and woodcuts of the plant appeared in illustrated renditions of the Psalms.74 The endorsement of medical authorities, as well as the enthusiastic support of the aristocracy and the clergy, provided legitimacy for what was already becoming an unbridled social habit among the lower classes.

THE RETURN OF TOBACCO TO AMERICA

Histories of contact between Europeans and the native inhabitants of North America often emphasize how the imposition of technologies, behaviours and ideologies characteristic of state-organized nations brought about dramatic changes and ‘acculturation’ in tribal or band-level societies. It is clear, however, that culture contact involves a bilateral exchange that frequently results in ‘transculturation’.75 Hence researchers are beginning to recognize that the influence of the New World on the Old was as significant as the impact of Europe on the Americas.76 Tobacco is, of course, only one of numerous examples; nevertheless, it is unique as the only important commodity that crossed the Atlantic in both directions and had sources and markets on both sides of the Ocean.

Once the English and French learned how to smoke, tobacco routinely accompanied sailors and explorers to the New World. The primary literature contains numerous allusions to the tobacco addiction of Europeans who lingered for extended periods in the nascent colonies. For example, Marc Lescarbot noted that the French, who had established a settlement at Port Royal (now in Nova Scotia) in 1606, were ‘for the most part so bewitched with this drunkenness of tobacco, that they can no more be without it than without meat or drink’. Pierre Biard added that ‘to inhale its fumes, they would sell their shirts’. Although the local Micmac were in a position to furnish the newcomers with the leaf, the French imported their own at a cost of ‘a crown a pound’.77
Among Amerindians, the act of offering tobacco was part of a semiotic domain involving communication among humans, as well as between humans and spirit beings. This likely contributed to the prominence that smoking had in early contacts with French and English explorers. Once Europeans recognized the symbolic and transactional value of nicotian products, it was a logical step to transfer these substances from their own personal travel bags to the bale of trade goods destined for the natives. That Amerindians often had their own supply did not seem to matter, since protocol dictated that a pipe ceremony and gifts of tobacco preceded barter exchange. Moreover, foreign tobacco was different, since it was imbued with the symbolic power often associated with the exotic.

The backwash of transculturation is documented as early as 1597, when Basque sailors offered tobacco to the Beothuk of Newfoundland in return for furs. During the first decade of the seventeenth century, ships occasionally diverted to the West Indies to pick up tobacco before proceeding to the eastern seaboard of North America to trade with native peoples. By 1604 Champlain had handed out quantities of the leaf to the eastern Abenaki whom he met along the coast of Maine. A few months later, the chronicler of an English expedition noted that these same Abenaki ‘gave us of their Tabacco in our pipes, which was excellent, and so generally commended of us all to be as good as any we ever tooke’. During this early period the substance was passed back and forth between peoples who possessed roughly equal amounts.

Meanwhile, efforts were under way to cultivate tobacco in England and reduce dependence on imports which, despite Anglo-Spanish hostility, often originated in Spanish colonial possessions. By 1611, the struggling Virginia colony also turned its attention to nicotian production. For reasons which may for ever remain unclear, the Jamestown settlers found that, despite rave reviews from earlier explorers, the local N. rustica was simply unpalatable, and they were forced to import a West Indies seed known as N. tabacum. The crop was an instant success and the Governor soon complained that the colonists were feverishly ‘rooting in the ground about tobacco like swine’ instead of growing corn and wheat. King James I wanted to convert the colony to a silkworms, but the Amerindian plant, known in England for less than fifty years, rapidly became the economic lifeline of the first permanent English settlement in North America. The success of the Virginia experience soon prompted the French, the Dutch and the Swedes to establish ‘tobacco colonies’ in North America.

By 1613–15 tobacco originating in the Spanish colonies in America was regularly purchased in Iberian ports and brought to France. Some of these products were transferred to ships bound for the St Lawrence River and traded to the Montagnais and other Algonquin-speaking peoples. As early as 1615, natives living as far inland as Ontario were canoeing hundreds of kilometres through the interior of Quebec to obtain European tobacco from French traders anchored at Tadoussac. For two centuries thereafter, tobacco was one of the most important goods in the French and English fur trades. Ironically, Amerindians deemed the Virginia product to be unsuitable in all but the most desperate transactions. Despite the availability of cheap stocks in their own colonial backyards, European trading companies were forced to obtain imported Brazilian tobacco.

While tobacco lubricated social relations and even facilitated colonial goals, seventeenth-century missionaries labouring in New France expressed ambivalence towards smoking. Although the Jesuits and Recollects affirmed the medical efficacy of the nicotian panacea and even experimented with the plant, they discouraged smoking among Amerindian neophytes, prohibited the practice in chapels and lauded converts who had abandoned the habit. At the same time they distributed tobacco bribes to encourage native peoples to attend sermons. They requisitioned tobacco from their superiors, claiming it was the only commodity acceptable to natives as payment for transportation, shelter and language tutoring. They destroyed sacred objects to which natives had traditionally offered the powdered leaf, and rewarded those converts who helped in this iconoclasm with presents of tobacco.

Soon after the first Algonquin pipes reached Europe, English pipes were being made for export to America. Indeed, sailors exploring the coast of Maine were already distributing pipes to the natives in 1605. Three years later, a ‘Tobacco-pipe-maker’ is listed among the tradesmen sent to the Virginia colony. Archaeological evidence from native and colonial sites suggests that the typical pipe assemblage during this period included Amerindian pipes, European pipes, Amerindian pipes made in European styles, Amerindian pipes manufactured with the aid of European material and technology, as well as European pipes imitating Amerindian fashions. Pipes manufactured by native peoples also ended up in Europe where they were valued for their ‘strength, handsomenes, and coolnes’. Examples of smoking devices moving back and forth across the cultural divide abound in the literature of the colonial period.

Some authorities have suggested that the influx of European tobacco and pipes made these commodities commonplace and threatened the ‘dignity’ of the Amerindian smoking complex, but archaeological and ethnographic evidence suggests that European contact fortified and maintained what had already been a widespread habit in late prehistoric eastern North America. The fur trade did, however, make tobacco and pipes available for the first time among some northern arctic and sub-arctic peoples. For example, the western Eskimo received tobacco and pipes from Asia, after the habit had circumnavigated the world on European ships. It was not long before they became the most important items in Russian-native trade. Interestingly, early reports allude to giddiness, intoxication and prostration in Eskimo smokers, suggesting that the leaf was easily adapted
to the cataleptic trances of ecstatic shamanism. Diffusion had come full circle and history had repeated itself.

As natives and newcomers sat across from one another, silently smoking and exchanging pipes and tobacco, they were lulled into thinking that the habit had always been part of their respective traditions. Ultimately, the popularity of tobacco on both sides of the Atlantic countered the European tendency to create an intellectual boundary between ‘savagery’ and ‘civilization’. Hence when the pipe emerged as the symbol of British sophistication during the late nineteenth century, scholars tried to demonstrate that it had not originated among the Indians after all but, rather, had an honourable pedigree in an Old World civilization. Smoking had become such an inextricable part of European life, the possibility that it had spread from the New World was simply inconceivable. Similarly, the aboriginal peoples of eastern North America were unaware of much of what they smoked after European contact came from Brazil. Nor, for that matter, did they recall that their own indigenous tobacco had originated in South America. Instead, they usually traced the plant to a single beneficent act by spirit beings that occurred at a specific time in their own history. Ethnologists and folklorists have recorded comparable origin myths in almost every culture on earth where the habit is now prevalent. What makes tobacco an especially peculiar substance is that, while it was never necessary for human survival and while smoking it was a learned behaviour spread through diffusion, it nevertheless permeated cultures to such an extent that disparate peoples on several continents laid claim to having discovered it independently.

NOTES


5 Ibid., pp. 149–50.


7 Winter, op. cit.

8 P. T. Furst, Hallucinogens and Culture, Novato, CA, Chandler & Sharp, 1976, p. 27.


10 Porter, op. cit.


26. These works contain over 300 individual passages relating specifically to the American use of tobacco or pipes. Given the large number of citations germane to each topic, only partial lists of the most accessible references are furnished. A more thorough analysis may be found in von Gernet, *Transculturalism*, op. cit.


34. Thwaites, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 137.


54 Thwaites, op. cit., vol. 7, p. 23.


61 De Bry, op. cit., p. 16.


63 Dickson, op. cit., p. 195.

64 Dickson, op. cit., p. 54.


66 A seventeenth-century example of the association between tobacco and drunkenness is afforded by the title of a well-known treatise on the subject: J. Balte, *Die Trückene Trunkenheit*, Nürnberg, 1658.
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N. Monardes, *Joyfull Newes Out of the Newe Founde Worldes*, J. Frampton (ed.), London, 1577. The tobacco-panacaia idea persisted despite circumstantial evidence that tobacco had serious deleterious effects. For example, Thomas Hariot, whose early descriptions helped popularize the habit and who had been taught to exhale through the nasal passages by the North Carolina Algonquians, had, by 1615, contracted cancer of the nose, from which he eventually died (von Gernet, ‘Transculturation’, op. cit., p. 37).


The term *transculturation* was introduced by the Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz (see Bronislaw Malinowski’s discussion of the neologism in F. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1947, pp. ix–x). I have revived it from the neologistic graveyard to describe the bilateral and interdependent historical trajectories of tobacco in post-Columbian America and New World societies. See von Gernet, ‘Transculturation’, op. cit.


An excellent example of the prominent role of tobacco, pipes and smoking may be found in the records of the Hudson’s Bay Company Fur Trade. See A. Ray and D. Freeman, *Give Us Good Measure: An Economic Analysis of Relations Between the Indians and the Hudson’s Bay Company Before 1763*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1978, pp. 53–62.

D. B. Quinn (ed.), *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*, New York, Arno and Hector Bye, 1979, vol. 4, p. 120.

Ibid., vol. 5, p. 123.


Thwaites, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 207.


Burrage, op. cit., pp. 367–8, 370.


